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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the theoretical rationale and the practical application of a teaching strategy that helps students organize psychological knowledge according to four perspectives: psychoanalytic, behavioristic, humanistic, and cognitive. The strategy is a simple flow chart which requires students to appropriately fill in boxes with names of theorists/researchers and terms and concepts associated with each of the four perspectives. A variation on the strategy is to give students a list of terms, concepts, phrases, and theorists to properly place under each rubric. The strategy is especially relevant to psychological foundations and survey courses. The strategy is part of an ongoing effort to offer psychology students better organizational tools to structure the massive amounts of complex information that they must understand and transfer such knowledge appropriately in order to better inform decision making and professional action. A sample classroom handout is included along with suggestions for how such a teaching tool could be used in the college classroom. (Author/SM)

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Helping Students Organize Psychological Knowledge

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Abstract

This paper describes the theoretical rationale and the practical application of a teaching strategy that helps students organize psychological knowledge according to the following four perspectives: psychoanalytic, behavioristic, humanistic, and cognitive. A sample classroom handout is included along with suggestions for how such a teaching tool might be employed in the college classroom.

Helping Students Organize Psychological Knowledge

Many university professors who are interested in striving for excellence in the teaching of psychology often demand that students think critically, construct their own knowledge, and transfer learning. If professors could agree that these are worthy and realistic goals in the teaching of psychology, how would we begin to design and implement teaching strategies that embody both the processes and outcomes reflected in such goals? The teaching strategy outlined in this paper was designed to help students in a wide variety of psychology courses organize their thinking about various theoretical viewpoints, terminology, concepts, and research findings in the field.

The field of psychology continues to generate an emerging knowledge base formulated upon the expansion of theoretical perspectives, methodological frameworks (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, laboratory studies, clinical studies, case studies), and research findings. Most professors and graduate assistants who stand before university students in order to teach psychology have accumulated a rich knowledge base in the field of psychology. Unfortunately, knowledge concerning psychology is a necessary, but not sufficient condition to positively influence the learning of psychology. Another crucial ingredient for excellence in teaching and learning is pedagogical knowledge.

Lee Shulman, the new President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, is well known for emphasizing

the importance of "pedagogical content knowledge" (PCK) as a tool for striving toward excellence in teaching. The PCK element in teaching focuses upon the nature of domain specific content in the teaching and learning process, the structure of process and end product components, and how teaching and learning is distinctive in different disciplines. Shulman (1987) also suggested that subject matter "comprehension alone is not sufficient. The usefulness of such knowledge lies in its value for judgement and action" (p. 14).

Shulman (1988) proposed that an outstanding teacher's expertise can be distinguished from the knowledge of subject matter in the following way:

> The teacher not only understands the content to be learned and understands it deeply, but comprehends which aspects of the content are crucial for **future** understanding of the subject and which are more peripheral and are less likely to impede learning if not fully grasped. (p.37)

Those who teach psychology must understand the field of psychology and the structure of psychological knowledge. Bruner (1960) promoted the view that a deeper understanding of the structure of knowledge in a discipline can lead to improved comprehension, recall, transfer, and reasoning in a particular content area.

Constructivist approaches to teaching and learning assert that the structure of knowledge makes a critical difference in

learning and students must integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge through personal perceptual processes and social interaction. Narode (1987) suggested that constructivist "concepts and their symbolic representations contain hidden epistemologies which must be elucidated by education researchers and then communicated to educators and students" (p. 34).

The need to explore these epistemologies in the field of psychology is long overdue. Such an exploration of psychological knowledge is also consistent with promoting teaching as scholarship, the building of teaching/learning communities, and the role of the teaching scholar/researcher. If chemistry professors have the Periodic Table and biology professors have a systematic way to classify lifeforms according to genus, phylum, and species, why don't psychology professors have similar organizational tools to help students learn psychology?

Overview of the Teaching Strategy

This paper outlines a brief teaching and learning tool that can be employed to structure and relate psychological knowledge and theory across the broad field of psychology. The primary purpose of this teaching strategy embodies past, present, and future implications of learning while accomplishing the following specific tasks:

(1) Helping students organize their knowledge about psychology that they bring from other courses and previous learning experiences outside the classroom.

(2) Assisting students as they conceptualize the course content in their current classroom context and other relevant simultaneous life experiences.

(3) Helping students develop a structural foundation of knowledge in the field of psychology that will promote the future acquisition and transfer of knowledge.

The theoretical basis for this strategy originates in cognitive psychology with ideas such as: constructivism, schema development, transfer of learning, and the structure of knowledge.

Nye (1996) in his book: Three psychologies: Perspectives from Freud, Skinner, and Rogers, has long advocated that we need to think about the field of psychology in terms of the following viewpoints: psychoanalytic, behavioristic, and humanistic. The fact that this popular textbook is currently in its 5th edition in part supports the idea that many psychologists and students see these three perspectives as demarcating fundamental viewpoints within the field of psychology. Nye (1996) offers readers an in-depth analysis of three major influences on contemporary thinking in psychology by exploring the ideas of Sigmund Freud, B. F. Skinner, and Carl R. Rogers. This textbook also offers insightful comparisons, contrasts, and criticisms of these viewpoints.

After using this relatively brief book (192 pages) as a supplement to the more traditional textbook in an introductory psychology course one semester, I found myself answering

different types of student questions that now compared and contrasted ideas and asking deeper personal questions about the relationships between ideas, theories, research methods, and research findings.

During my two decades of teaching in the field of psychology, I find myself moving more and more toward conceptualizing and teaching the content of psychology according to distinctive viewpoints. Anecdotal evidence from students suggests that such a teaching and learning strategy helps them better understand the field. An empirical research study that explores the ability of this teaching strategy to predict classroom exam performance is currently in progress.

Early in my personal conceptualizing of the field of psychology, I found it necessary to add the cognitive perspective to the model. My early inclinations to add this fourth perspective now seem visionary as I reflect upon this decision, since cognitive psychology has dramatically increased its influence on the field of psychology over the past decades.

Use of the Teaching Strategy

This strategy (see Figure 1) is a simple flow chart which requires students to appropriately fill in boxes with names of theorists/researchers and terms and concepts associated with each of the four perspectives in psychology. This teaching and learning tool has many uses in the classroom.

Students have used this strategy at the beginning of the semester and then again at the end of the semester to document

entry knowledge and progress in organizing what they have learned. Common student misconceptions derived from an analysis of student errors on the chart have been reviewed in class and the common student misunderstandings of content that are still resistant to further teaching and learning become the basis for later exam questions. The handout provided in Figure 1 could actually become an exam. While it only takes approximately 15 minutes for students to complete this chart in a free recall format, the results quickly inform both student and instructor on issues of mastery of basic concepts and terminology while pointing out points of confusion and forgotten material.

Another instructional variation of this technique that has been used successfully includes giving students a list of terms, concepts, phrases, and theorists to properly place under each rubric. This strategy offers greater instructor control of the content to be organized by students and allows professors to customize the content to be considered around key elements in a course or the field. After students have attempted to carefully arrange the content in the boxes and turn in their work, I offer them immediate feedback on their work based upon my arrangement of these terms, phrases, and theorists on the identical chart.

Figure 2 depicts an example of the feedback on the four perspectives that I have offered to students in an educational psychology course after they have first attempted to organize their ideas in a free recall situation. Much of the content contained in Figure 2 was taken from the textbook: Psychology in

teaching, learning, and growth (Hamachek, 1995).

Rich class discussions related to supportive and contradictory evidence for specific categorizations have ensued in the college classroom. It is sometimes determined that certain theorists/researchers do not nicely fit under any headings and that some psychologists might justifiably fit into two or even more perspectives. Learning seems to be most enhanced when the arguments for inclusion or exclusion are based upon specific evidence regarding the work or ideas of a theorist/researcher.

This teaching strategy is especially relevant to psychological foundation and survey courses such as: introductory psychology, child development, adolescent development, life-span developmental psychology, and educational psychology. A strong case could likely be made for using such an approach in courses like: topical seminars, human motivation, history of psychology, and senior exit-level seminars. Students who are only required to complete a limited number of psychology service courses and graduate/undergraduate students who have been away from the field for some time might also benefit from a brief overview and review of the field.

Summary

This teaching strategy is part of an ongoing dream to offer the students of psychology better organizational tools to structure the massive amounts of complex information that they must understand deeply and transfer such knowledge appropriately

so as to better inform decision making and professional action. An additional benefit of employing this teaching strategy is that I am constantly learning from my students about how to better organize and conceptualize psychological content, theory, and research findings. The possibility of critically stimulating the intellectual mindsets of students, being challenged to question and clarify my own beliefs about the field of psychology, and sharing such ideas with other psychologists who wish to improve college and university teaching is what continues to attract me to the profession of teaching psychology.

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DISTINCTIVE VIEWPOINTS IN PSYCHOLOGY

Developed by: William E. Herman, Ph.D.

PSYCHOANALYTIC VIEW	BEHAVIORISTIC VIEW	HUMANISTIC VIEW	COGNITIVE VIEW
NAMES OF PROMINENT THEORISTS	NAMES OF PROMINENT THEORISTS	NAMES OF PROMINENT THEORISTS	NAMES OF PROMINENT THEORISTS
KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS	KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS	KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS	KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Figure 1

DISTINCTIVE VIEWPOINTS IN PSYCHOLOGY

Developed by: William E. Herman, Ph.D

PSYCHOANALYTIC VIEW	BEHAVIORISTIC VIEW	HUMANISTIC VIEW	COGNITIVE VIEW
NAMES OF PROMINENT THEORISTS	**NAMES OF PROMINENT THEORISTS**	**NAMES OF PROMINENT THEORISTS**	**NAMES OF PROMINENT THEORISTS**
Sigmund Freud Erik Erikson Carl G. Jung Fritz Redl	B. F. Skinner Ivan Pavlov John B. Watson Lee Canter	Abraham Maslow Carl R. Rogers Don Hamachek Howard Kirschenbaum	Piaget Bloom Kagan Weiner Gardner Kohlberg Guilford Bruner Sternberg
KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS	**KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS**	**KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS**	**KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS**
id, ego, & superego 5 psychosexual stages unconscious motivation defense mechanisms 8 psychosocial stages identification transference countertransference hidden factors Oedipal/Electra crisis symbolic meanings	operant conditioning classical conditioning + & - reinforcement punishment (2 types) extrinsic motivation most scientific view objectivity valued more than subjectivity environmental forces S--R psychology Premack principle reductionistic view assertive discipline	wholistic view intrinsic motivation self concept 5 levels of Needs mental health existentialism empathy healthy relationships clinical viewpoint subjective experience feelings/values personal meaning values clarification	4 cognitive stages moral development intrinsic/extrinsic motivation interactionism constructivism scientific reasoning human memory model STM, LTM, & chunking structure of intellect convergent/divergent thinking multiple intelligences 6 levels of Taxonomy S---O---R viewpoint discovery learning impulsive/reflective attribution theory

Figure 2